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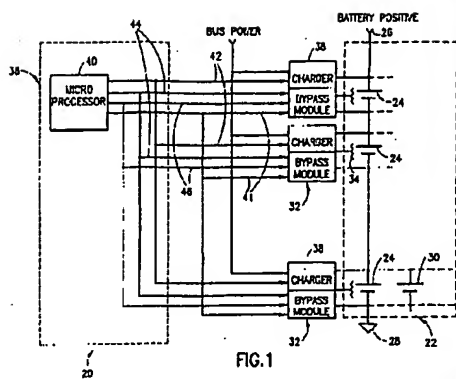
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(54) **A battery charge management architecture**

(57) A system (20) for managing the operation of a battery (22) such as a lithium ion battery having a plurality of serially connected individual cells (24) comprises a bypass module (32) electrically in parallel with each individual cell or, alternatively, with at least one of the cells or alternatively again with an individual cell and its associated grouping of one or more parallel cells. The module (32) includes a sensor (34) for detecting an operating condition of its associated cell and a charger (38) operable for charging the cell. A charge controller (40) is electrically connected with each bypass module and is operable in response to an operating condition of a cell detected by the sensor (34) which is outside a predetermined range of magnitudes to change the bypass module to the conductive mode and thereby shunt current around the battery cell, while

leaving unaffected each of the remaining cells. The charge controller (36) includes a processor (40) with mode selecting means for initiating operation of the charger for charging each of the plurality of cells, and a capability for establishing voltage and current set points for each of the bypass modules to thereby prevent overcharging of each associated cell. The processor (40) is also operable for performing a multi step charge profile for each of the bypass modules such that when a predetermined voltage is achieved at the conclusion of a step, a subsequent step is performed at a reduced charge current until a final predetermined voltage is achieved at a charge current which has been reduced to zero.



Description

Field of the Invention

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The present invention relates generally to battery charging techniques and, more particularly, to managing the charge of a battery system by utilizing individual cell charge/bypass units. The architecture provided by the invention protects the battery from overcharge, overvoltage, overcurrent, and open circuit while allowing the battery assembly to provide normal functioning in the event of any single point failures.

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Background to the Invention

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While the present invention is not limited to lithium ion batteries, it has a particular benefit when applied to their use because of their unique operating characteristics. Lithium ion batteries are rapidly becoming the power source of choice for space applications. They exhibit the highest concentrations of available power both per unit volume and per unit weight of any known battery and can store more energy than NiCd, nickel-metal hydride (NiMH), and other rechargeable types.

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Because of one of their unique operating characteristics, lithium ion battery cells require careful charge management to ensure that significant over charge does not occur. This is for the reason that lithium ion batteries possess an extreme sensitivity to overcharging not found in most other types of batteries. Such charge management is achieved by limiting the maximum voltage to which the cell is charged. In order to achieve the maximum possible energy stored in the cell while limiting the over charge, a device is required that controls the voltage. Also, in many applications, if a cell opens, then the whole battery would be lost. It is desirable to allow a cell to be completely bypassed if it fails in this manner. The ability to monitor temperature and adjust the maximum charge voltage accordingly is also desirable. A feature to allow varying the charge voltage setpoint from outside the device is also desired.

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Previous battery cell management devices for nickel hydrogen or nickel cadmium cells typically used diodes or a relay device to short out failed cells. These earlier battery technologies were not as sensitive to over charge as lithium ion cells and consequently did not require devices to precisely control each individual cell voltage.

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Other known prior art includes the approach typically used by automotive applications that are presently under development. The approach used is to connect a relay in series with a fixed resistor that is connected around the cell. Some appropriate circuit or computer is used to monitor battery voltage and closes the relay when a voltage limit is reached. The resistor is set to shunt current around the cell so that it stops charging. This approach is inexpensive and simple but does not provide optimal charge control and may reduce battery life.

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Summary of the Invention

According to a first aspect of the present invention, a system for managing the operation of a battery such as a lithium ion battery having a plurality of serially connected cells comprises:

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a bypass module electrically in parallel with each individual cell including sensing means

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for detecting an operating condition of the cell and a charger operable for charging the cell;
and,

5 a charge controller electrically connected with each of said bypass modules, said charge
controller being operable in response to an operating condition of a cell detected by said
sensing means to change the mode of operation of the associated bypass module and
thereby shunt current around the battery cell, while leaving unaffected each of the remaining
10 cells.

According to a second aspect of the present invention a method of managing a battery having
15 a plurality of serially connected cells comprises the steps of detecting the operational
condition of each cell and selectively rerouting a charge current to bypass a cell in response
to the detected operational condition of the cell without affecting the remaining cells.

Previous approaches have involved the use of mechanical or electronic switches in parallel
20 with a battery cell to bypass current in the event of overcharge conditions. The individual
battery charger approach of the invention provides tolerance to any single point failures
without allowing overcharge to the battery cell which can result in damage to the battery, even
a disastrous explosion. The individual charger approach allows loss of a single cell or charge
25 circuit while allowing the battery assembly to continue to function.

As a result, the invention provides a high level of fault tolerance while minimizing the
number of components and thereby reducing cost. The individual chargers will allow special
adjustment of voltage and current of individual cells to optimize cell performance while
30 enhancing life without dissipating waste heat.

The approach of the invention comprises the connection of individual chargers to each battery
cell in a string of "N" battery cells. The design approach utilizes a "bypass" device to allow
the battery assembly to function in the event of an open circuit, battery cell or the loss of a
35 charger. Each charge/bypass device will allow individual control of voltage and current via
external control signals. This allows optimization on of battery cell charging by varying the
external control signals. Additional circuitry is included that prevents the charger from
allowing overcharge of the battery in various failure conditions so the device is single point
40 failure tolerant. The charge device can be used to support any charge voltage or current profile
as desired. One potential application is to support a two-step charge profile wherein the
charger provides a constant current to each cell. When a first desired voltage is reached the
circuit reduces the charge current to one-half of the initial setting; when a second desired
45 voltage is reached the charge current is reduced to zero. The inputs to the individual chargers
can be operated at any desired voltage. In the envisioned application, the input would be the
main spacecraft bus, typically 100V or 50V. Additional circuitry to monitor temperature or other
telemetry circuits can be made available

50 In keeping with the invention, one bypass device would be required for each battery cell.
Possible implementations might use hybrids, ASICS or a custom integrated circuit design. The
bypass device of the invention is applicable to any usage of lithium ion batteries including
commercial or automotive applications.

55 Another aspect of the invention is to provide such an improved battery charge management
architecture which protects the battery from overcharge, overvoltage, overcurrent, and open

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circuit situations while allowing the battery assembly to provide normal functioning in the event of any single point failures

5 **Brief Description of the Drawings**

An example of the present invention will now be described in detail with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

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Figure 1 is a schematic diagram of a battery charging and management system embodying the present invention; and,

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Figure 2 is a graph depicting a two-step charge profile performed in accordance with the invention.

20 **Detailed Description**

Figure 1 illustrates a system 20 embodying the present invention for managing the operation of a battery 22 having a plurality of serially connected individual cells 24. It was earlier
25 mentioned that while the invention is not to be so limited, a particularly useful application of the invention is in conjunction with lithium ion batteries which are presently in great demand for powering onboard systems of space vehicles. Hence, in the ensuing description, it will be assumed that the battery 22 is a lithium ion battery.

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In the system 20 presented graphically in Figure 1, the plurality of cells 24 extends between battery positive 26 and battery ground 28 and each cell 24 in the series chain may have one or a plurality of additional cells 30 connected with it in parallel.

35 A bypass module 32 is electrically in parallel with each individual cell 24 or alternatively with at least one of the cells 24 or alternatively again with an individual cell 24 and its associated grouping of one or more parallel cells 30. The bypass module 32 includes a sensor 34 for detecting an operating condition of the associated cell 24 or cell 30. In this regard, the sensor 34 may be of any suitable type capable of detecting, for example, voltage or
40 temperature.

A charge controller 36 is electrically connected with each of the bypass modules 32 and has a conductive mode and a normally non conductive mode. The charge controller is operable to change to the conductive mode when an operating condition of the battery cell exceeds a
45 predetermined value to thereby shunt current around the battery cell. The sensor 34 may be a temperature transducer such as a thermistor for measuring battery cell temperature and a cell temperature comparator such as an operational amplifier is operable to generate a temperature excessive signal when the signal from the temperature transducer exceeds a predetermined
50 value, the charge controller then being operable to change to the conductive mode and thereby shunt current around the battery cell. The sensor may also be a voltage comparator such as an operational amplifier for measuring voltage across the cell, the charge controller being operable in response to a voltage excessive signal to change the charge controller to the
55 conductive mode and thereby shunt current around the battery cell. The charge controller may include a voltage limiting operational amplifier operable for transmitting a voltage excessive

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output signal when the input thereto exceeds a predetermined value and a transistor having a predetermined gate voltage allowing bypass current flow, the transistor being responsive to the voltage excessive output signal from the voltage limiting operational amplifier to shunt current
5 around the battery cell.

Signals from the sensor 34 are directed to a microprocessor 40 as a component of the charge controller 36 via a telemetry lead 41. Thus, the charge controller is operable in response to an operating condition of a cell detected by the sensor 34 which is outside a predetermined range
10 of magnitudes to change the bypass module 32 to the conductive mode and thereby shunt current around the battery cell 24, while leaving unaffected each of the remaining cells.

The bypass module 32 also includes a charger 38 operable for charging the cells 24, 30. Instructions for initiating operation of the charger 38 for charging each of the cells emanate
15 from the microprocessor 40 with mode selecting capability indicated by lead 42. The microprocessor 40 also includes the capability, indicated by leads 44, 46, respectively, of establishing voltage and current set points for each of the bypass modules 32 to thereby prevent overcharging of each associated cell. Indeed, preferably, the microprocessor 40 is operable for
20 performing a multi step charge profile for each of the bypass modules such that when a predetermined voltage is achieved at the conclusion of a step, a subsequent step is performed at a reduced charge current until a final predetermined voltage is achieved at a charge current which has been reduced to zero. See Figure 2.

Claims

1. A system (20) for managing the operation of a battery (22) having a plurality of serially
30 connected individual cells (24) comprising:

a bypass module (32) electrically in parallel with each individual cell (24) including sensing means (34) for detecting an operating condition of the cell and a charger (38) operable for charging the cell; and,
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a charge controller (36) electrically connected with each of said bypass modules (32), said charge controller being operable in response to an operating condition of a cell detected by said sensing means (34) to change the mode of operation of the associated
40 bypass module and thereby shunt current around the battery cell, while leaving unaffected each of the remaining cells.

2. A system according to claim 1, wherein said charge controller (36) includes a processor (40) with mode selecting means for initiating operation of said charger for charging each of the plurality of cells.
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3. A system according to claim 2, wherein said processor (40) includes means for establishing voltage and current set points for each of said bypass modules (32) to thereby prevent overcharging of each associated cell.
50

4. A system according to claim 2 or 3, wherein said processor (40) is operable for performing a multi step charge profile for each of said bypass modules (32) such that when a
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predetermined voltage is achieved at the conclusion of a step, a subsequent step is performed at a reduced charge current until a final predetermined voltage is achieved at a charge current which has been reduced to zero.

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5. A system according to any preceding claim, wherein the battery is a lithium ion battery.

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6. In combination:

a battery (22) having a plurality of serially connected individual cells (24);

15

a bypass module (32) electrically in parallel with at least one of said individual cells including sensing means (34) for detecting an operating condition of the cell and a charger (38) operable for charging said cell; and,

20

a charge controller (40) electrically connected with each of said bypass modules (32), said charge controller being operable in response to an operating condition of said cell detected by said sensing means (34) to change the mode of operation of the associated bypass module (32) to the conductive mode and thereby shunt current around said cell, while leaving unaffected each of the remaining cells.

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7. A method of managing the operation of a battery having a plurality of serially connected individual cells comprising the steps of detecting the operational condition of each cell and selectively rerouting a charge current to bypass a cell in response to the detected operational condition of the cell without affecting the remaining cells.

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8. A method according to claim 7, in which the charge current is shunted to bypass the cell in dependence on the charge state of the cell.

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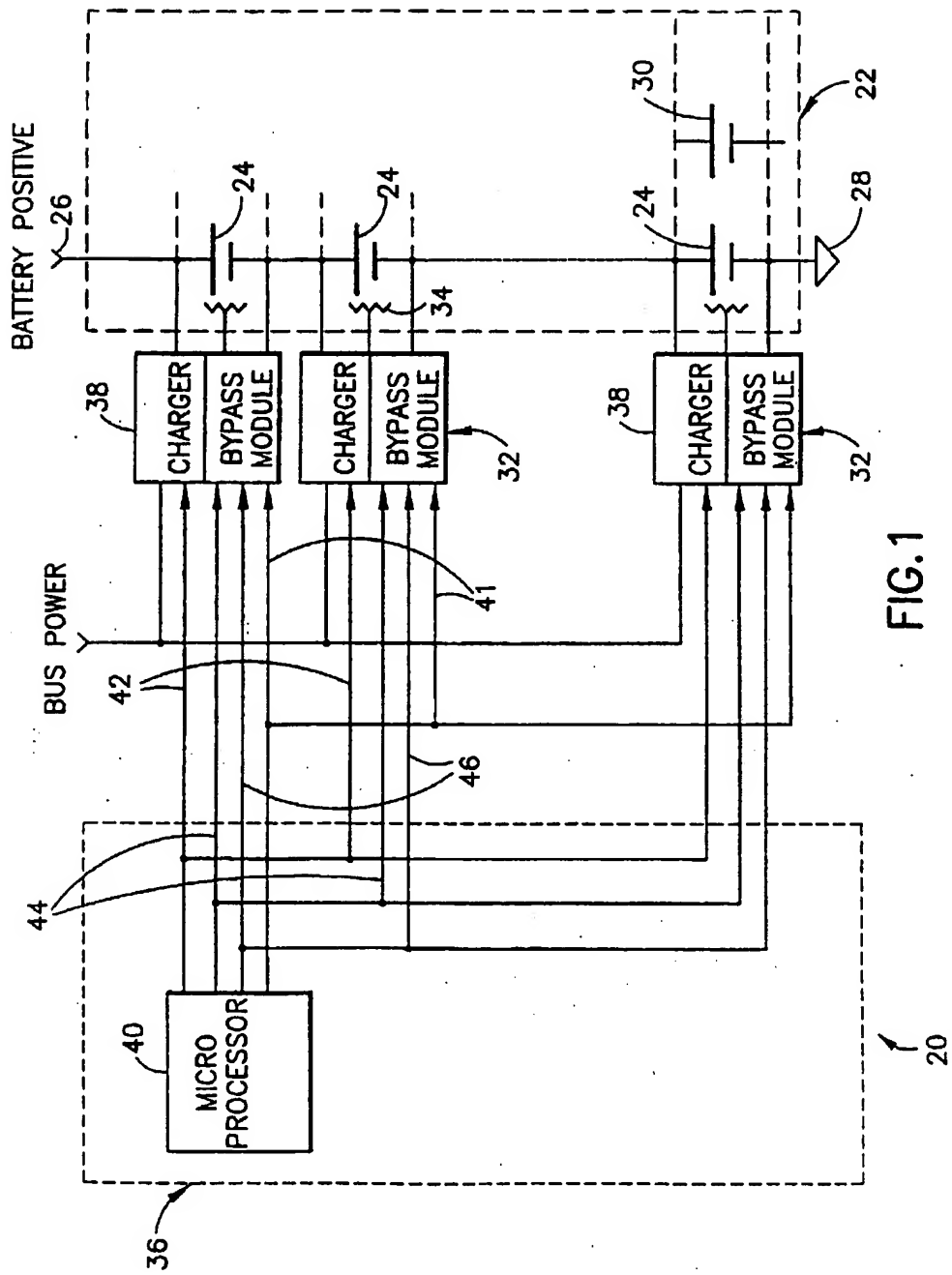


FIG. 1

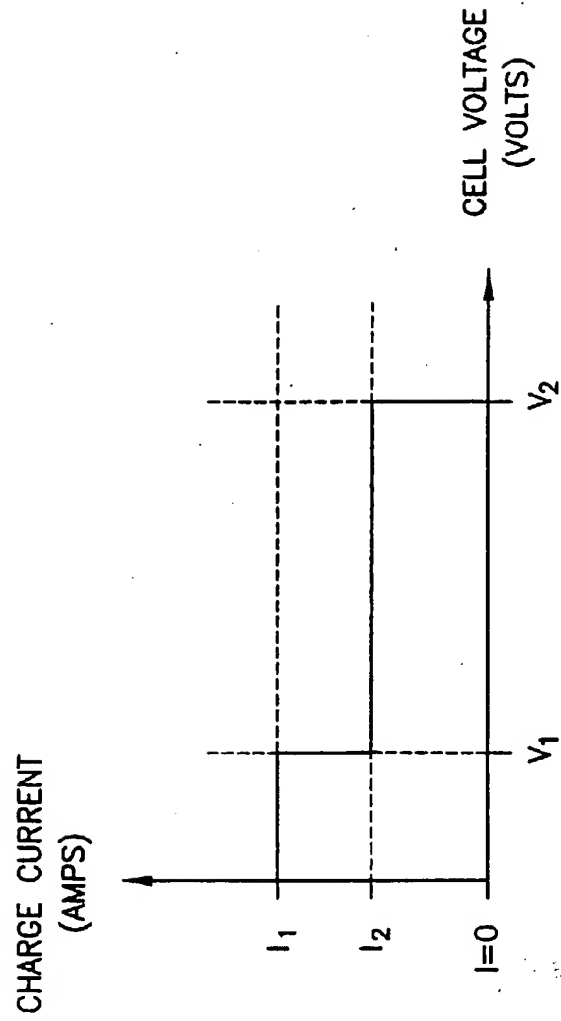


FIG.2

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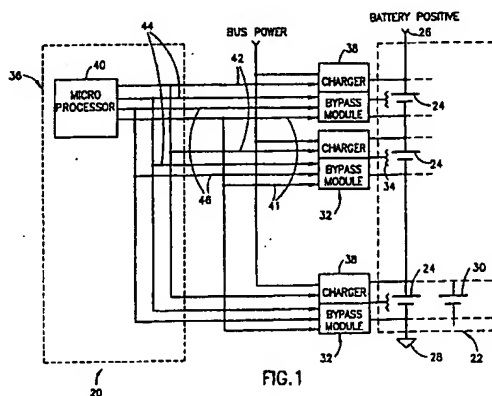
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predetermined voltage is achieved at a charge current which has been reduced to zero.

**FIG. 1****EP 1 014 533 A3**



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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
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Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.7)
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X	US 5 773 959 A (TEOFILO VINCENT L ET AL) 30 June 1998 (1998-06-30) * column 5, paragraph 1; figure 2 *	1,5-8	
X	EP 0 809 342 A (ACCUMULATEURS FIXES) 26 November 1997 (1997-11-26) * column 4, line 4 - line 19; figure 1 *	1,6-8	
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The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search THE HAGUE		Date of completion of the search 7 February 2001	Examiner Moyle, J
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document			

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**ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT
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